

Theory of Change Template Worked Example

October 2026

A made-up program. All names, places, organizations and figures are invented.

Context

Problem Statement

In Kaluma, Odenti and Bessa districts of Upper Terrace Province, 31 percent of the 210,000 children aged 5 to 17 (about 65,000) do work that harms their health or keeps them out of school, mostly on farms and in quarries, and 14 percent of girls aged 15 to 17 are married. Only 9 of the 280 villages have a working child protection committee, and 82 percent of households do not know where to report a child in danger. These figures come from the program's design study in June 2026, which covered 900 households, 16 village discussions and 24 service points (schools, health centers, police desks and welfare offices), and from the 2024 provincial household survey.

Who Is Affected

Group	Size	Situation
School-Age Children	About 210,000	Aged 5 to 17; 31 percent do harmful work, mostly on farms and in quarries; 14 percent of girls aged 15 to 17 are married.
Poorest Households	About 6,000 targeted	Rely on children's earnings for food; little savings and no access to credit.
Village Leaders and Families	280 villages	Decide how families settle disputes and when girls marry; most villages have no committee and no training on child rights.
Social Workers and Service Staff	9 social workers; 24 service points	No agreed steps for referring a child in danger; nine social workers cover three districts.

Causes and Barriers

Cause	Evidence	Addressed In
Households depend on children's earnings.	68 percent of households with a working child said the income buys food.	Pathway 2
Few villages have a committee to notice and act on harm.	Only 9 of 280 villages have a working child protection committee.	Pathway 1
No clear route for a child in danger.	82 percent of households did not know where to report; cases waited 11 weeks for a response.	Pathway 1
Local norms accept child work and early marriage.	In 12 of 16 village discussions, people called work from age 10 and marriage of girls at 15 to 17 normal.	Pathway 1 (support)
School costs are too high for poor families.	57 percent of out-of-school children named fees and materials.	Pathway 2

Goal

Item	Detail
Goal Statement	Children in Kaluma, Odenti and Bessa districts grow up in school and in safe homes, with far less harmful work and early marriage.
Who and Where	All children aged 5 to 17 in 280 villages: about 210,000 children, over 36 months from January 2027 to December 2029. Lantern Bridge International delivers the program with the Marenda Child Welfare Alliance (the Alliance), a national organization.
Measure	Children doing harmful work fall from 31 to 28 percent (about 6,300 fewer children), and married girls aged 15 to 17 fall from 14 to 12 percent (about 480 fewer girls, out of about 24,000), between the baseline household survey (2027) and the final household survey (October 2029).
Not Claimed	Changes in national child labor or marriage laws, which depend on national policy and the economy.

Narrative

The Story in Brief

Children in the three districts work and marry early because families need the income, no one in the village is responsible for noticing harm, and a child in danger has nowhere clear to go. Committees and referral services only work together, so the program builds both. Lantern Bridge International and the Marenda Child Welfare Alliance will do this through two pathways.

Pathway 1 builds a protection system the community owns. If villages form and train committees, if the Provincial Social Welfare Office hosts 12 case workers, if every service point agrees written referral steps, and if community dialogues change views on early marriage, then families will know where to report, committees will notice harm early, children in danger will receive help within 14 days and fewer girls will marry before 18.

Pathway 2 eases the need for children's earnings. If 6,000 of the poorest households join savings groups and receive a one-time grant paid in two parts, the second tied to school enrollment, then they can cover food and school costs without sending children to work. Together the two pathways lead to fewer children in harmful work and fewer girls married early, the goal.

How the Pathways Fit Together

The pathways meet in the household: the committee identifies a child at risk, and the case worker links the family to savings and grant support. If either fails, the other cannot reach the goal alone. Two links are the least certain: whether services answer referrals within 14 days, and whether the grant and savings are enough to replace children's earnings. The monitoring system will track both first. Views on early marriage change slowly, so the yearly household survey tracks them too. The program will not enforce the law, build schools or change national child protection policy.

Diagram

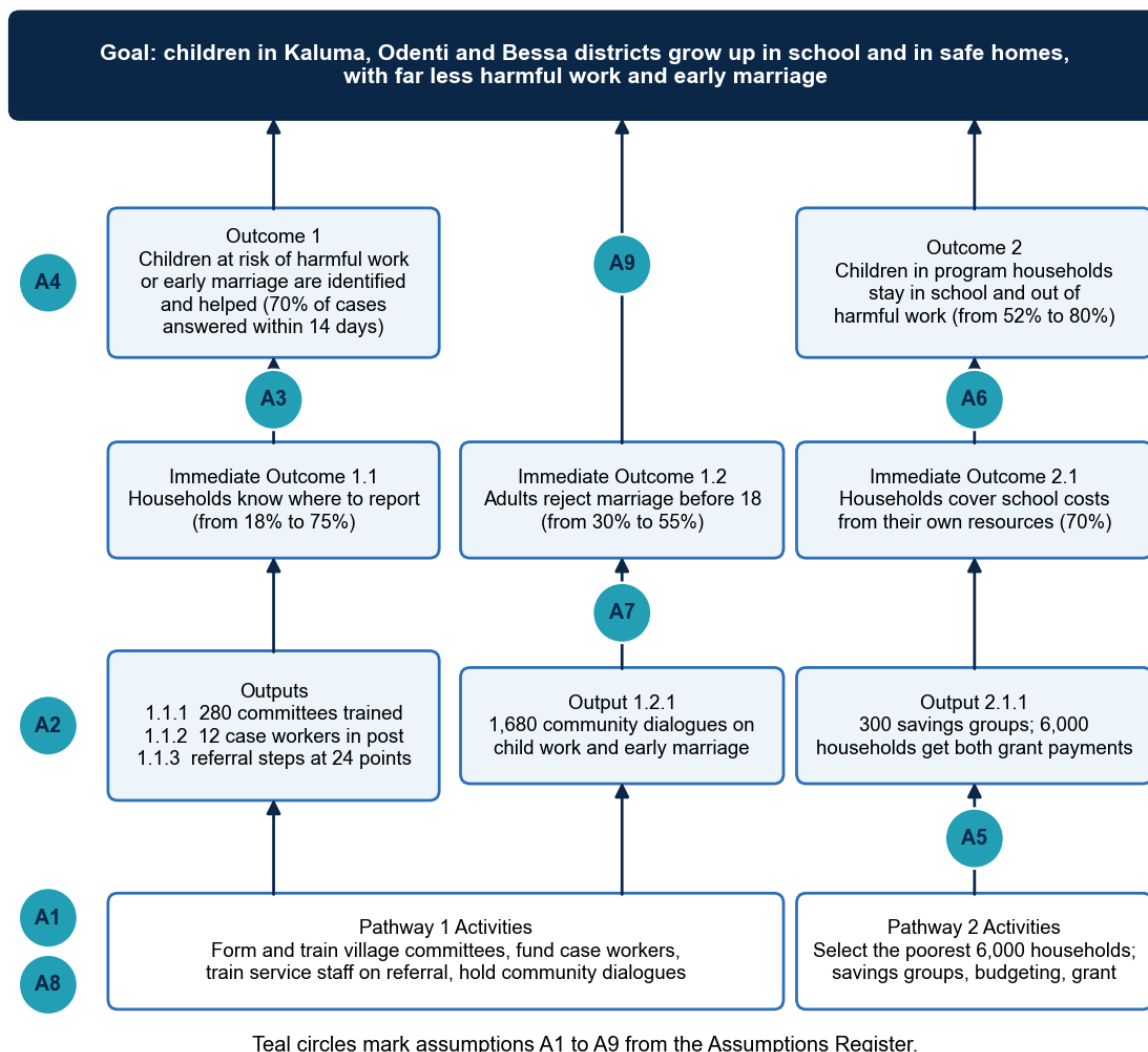


Figure 1. The two pathways, from Activities to the Goal, with assumptions A1 to A9 marked.

Pathway Tables

Pathway 1

Pathway 1 is the protection pathway: committees and case referral that keep children safe.

Level	What Changes	Preconditions	Assumption	Evidence
Problem	Only 9 of 280 villages have a committee; 82 percent of households do not know where to report; cases wait 11 weeks.	The Provincial Social Welfare Office and 24 service points took part in the design study.	Village leaders will welcome committees and back their decisions.	Moderate: design study of 900 households, June 2026.
Activities	Form and train committees of seven members in 280 villages; train 160 service staff on referral steps; fund 12 case workers; hold community dialogues on child work and early marriage.	Written posting terms for the 12 case workers signed with the Provincial Social Welfare Office by month 6; trainers certified by month 3.	Committee members, who are unpaid, stay active.	Moderate: 2024 pilot in 14 villages of Tessen district, outside the program area, where 12 committees were still meeting after a year.
Output 1.1.1	280 committees formed and trained (1,960 members).	Funds released on schedule; Alliance staff in each district by month 3.	Members attend training and use it.	Moderate: pilot members attended 85 percent of sessions.
Output 1.1.2	12 case workers in post.	Written posting terms signed by month 6; case worker budget released.	The Provincial Social Welfare Office hosts the case workers and keeps them in post.	Weak: the Office agreed to host the posts in September 2026, and no posting has yet lasted a year.
Output 1.1.3	Written referral steps agreed and in use at all 24 service points, with 160 staff trained.	Trainers certified by month 3; heads of service points release staff for training.	Staff follow the written steps.	Moderate: service staff asked for written steps in the August 2026 review.
Output 1.2.1	Community dialogues on child work and early marriage held twice a year in each of the 280 villages (1,680 in three years).	Facilitators trained by month 4; village leaders agree to host the dialogues.	Women, men and leaders attend and speak openly.	Moderate: people spoke openly about marriage and work in 12 of 16 design study village discussions.
Immediate Outcome 1.1	Households know where to report: 75 percent can name a place to report a child in danger (18 percent now).	Reporting number posted in each village; dialogues held twice a year in every village.	Knowing where to report leads families to report.	Moderate: in pilot villages, 64 percent could name a place.
Immediate Outcome 1.2	Families and leaders reject marriage before age 18: 55 percent of adults say a girl should not marry before 18 (30 percent now).	Dialogues reach women, men and village leaders; girls' views are heard through the child-friendly reporting number.	Dialogues change what families and leaders believe about early marriage.	Weak: views on marriage have been slow to change in comparable programs; check every year.
Outcome 1	Children at risk of harmful work or early marriage are identified and helped (70 percent of reported cases are answered within 14 days, up from near zero).	Case workers have transport; schools, health centers and police desks accept referrals.	Services act on referrals and case workers stay in post.	Weak: response times not yet tested at scale; check each month.

Pathway 2

Pathway 2 is the family support pathway: households that can afford to keep children in school.

Level	What Changes	Preconditions	Assumption	Evidence
Problem	Households rely on children's earnings; school costs are too high; local norms accept child work.	Village wealth rankings list the poorest households; the Alliance already works in all three districts.	Households will use support to keep children in school.	Moderate: 900 households and 16 village discussions, June 2026.
Activities	Select the poorest 6,000 households with village committees; form 300 savings groups of 20 households; train members in budgeting; pay a grant of USD 120 in two parts, the second tied to school enrollment.	Savings group trainers in post by month 4; grant funds open by month 6; selection rules published.	Villages accept the selection of households as fair.	Weak: selection by village ranking not tested at scale; check through the complaints log.
Output 2.1.1	300 savings groups formed; 6,000 households receive both grant payments.	Groups meet every two weeks; payments made by mobile money.	Households save regularly and groups stay together.	Moderate: 17 of 20 pilot groups were still saving after a year.
Immediate Outcome 2.1	Households cover school costs from their own resources (70 percent do).	Budgeting training completed; groups lend to members.	Extra income reaches the household and is spent on children's needs.	Moderate: in the pilot, 61 percent covered school costs.
Outcome 2	Children in program households stay in school and out of harmful work (80 percent, up from 52 percent).	Schools are open and reachable; school fees do not rise.	Households keep children in school instead of sending them to work.	Weak: the pilot ran for only one school year; check attendance every term.

Assumptions Register

ID	Assumption	Where It Sits	Confidence	How We Will Check It
A1	Village leaders welcome committees and back their decisions.	Problem to Activities, Pathway 1	Medium	Committee minutes; quarterly Alliance visits.
A2	The Provincial Social Welfare Office hosts the 12 case workers and keeps them in post.	Output 1.1.2	Medium	Staffing list every quarter.
A3	Knowing where to report leads families to report.	Immediate Outcome 1.1 to Outcome 1	Medium	Case register; yearly household survey.
A4	Services act on referrals within 14 days.	Outcome 1	Low	Referral log checked each month.
A5	Villages accept the selection of the poorest households as fair.	Activities, Pathway 2	Medium	Complaints log; village meeting after each selection.
A6	Households use the grant and savings to keep children in school instead of sending them to work.	Immediate Outcome 2.1 to Outcome 2	Low	School attendance records; yearly interviews with parents.
A7	Dialogues change what families and leaders believe about early marriage.	Output 1.2.1 to Immediate Outcome 1.2	Low	Yearly household survey; village discussions each year.
A8	Committee members keep working without pay.	Activities, Pathway 1	Medium	Committee meeting records each quarter.
A9	Families and leaders who reject early marriage act on it, and girls marry later.	Immediate Outcome 1.2 to Goal	Medium	Yearly household survey; age at marriage in village records.

External Factors

Factor	Possible Effect	Our Response
Drought or Crop Failure	Household incomes fall and more children are sent to work.	Time grant payments to the lean season; hold 5 percent of grant funds in reserve for extra support in a bad season.
Rise in Food Prices	The grant buys less and families cut school spending.	Review the grant size every year and add a top-up for the poorest households when prices jump.
Welfare Budget or Staff Changes	Case workers are moved or posts stay empty.	Agree written posting terms with the Provincial Social Welfare Office; train a deputy for each case worker.
Conflict or Displacement	Committees cannot meet and families move away.	Keep contact by phone; refer moved children to the welfare office in the new district.

Reality Check

Question	Our Answer
Is there evidence these links work elsewhere?	Mixed. Records from comparable programs support village committees with clear referral steps and small cash support tied to school. Evidence that views on early marriage change within three years is weaker, so the community dialogues are monitored most closely.
Is the scale of change realistic for the budget?	USD 2.9 million for about 210,000 children is about USD 14 per child. Family support for 6,000 households is the largest cost. The goal targets follow what the pathways can reach. The 6,000 households have about 12,000 children (two per household), and Outcome 2 lifts the share in school and out of harmful work from 52 to 80 percent: 28 points, or about 3,360 children. Harmful work falling from 31 to 28 percent of 210,000 children means about 6,300 fewer children, so Pathway 1 must account for about 2,940, which is three to four children per village each year. The 2024 pilot in Tessen district tested committees, savings groups and school costs; it did not measure child labor or marriage, so the baseline survey in 2027 will test these targets.
Can the outcomes be observed before the program ends?	Partly. The final household survey takes place in October 2029, two months before the program ends in December 2029. A survey detects only large changes in marriage among girls, so the program also tracks school attendance and referred cases every year.
Who might be left out or harmed?	Children with disabilities and children living away from their parents are the least likely to be seen by committees; outreach for both is added in year 1. A report to a committee could expose a child to retaliation; confidentiality rules and yearly village discussions will check this.
Could the same change happen without the program?	Partly. Child labor fell from 33 to 31 percent over the last five years, about 0.4 points a year. At that pace the rate would be about 30 percent by 2029; the target of 28 percent needs a fall about two and a half times faster than the trend.
Have the people affected reviewed this theory?	Yes. See the Review section.

Indicators

Code	Result	Indicator	Target	Source and When
GL-1	Goal	Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 doing harmful work in the three districts.	28% (baseline 31%)	Household survey at the start and end of the program
GL-2	Goal	Percentage of girls aged 15 to 17 who are married.	12% (baseline 14%)	Household survey at the start and end of the program
OC-1	Outcome 1	Percentage of reported child protection cases that receive a response within 14 days.	70% (baseline near 0%; cases wait 11 weeks)	Case register, quarterly
OC-2	Outcome 2	Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 in program households who are in school and not in harmful work.	80% (baseline 52%)	Household survey and school records, yearly
IO-1	Immediate Outcome 1.1	Percentage of households that can name a place to report a child in danger.	75% (baseline 18%)	Household survey, yearly
IO-2	Immediate Outcome 1.2	Percentage of adults who say a girl should not marry before age 18.	55% (baseline 30%)	Household survey, yearly

Code	Result	Indicator	Target	Source and When
IO-3	Immediate Outcome 2.1	Percentage of program households that cover school costs from their own resources.	70% (baseline 38%)	Household survey and savings group records, yearly
OP-1	Output 1.1.1	Number of villages with a trained committee that meets.	280	Committee records, quarterly
OP-2	Output 1.1.2	Number of case workers in post.	12	Staffing list, quarterly
OP-3	Output 1.1.3	Number of service points using written referral steps.	24	Service point visits, quarterly
OP-4	Output 1.2.1	Number of community dialogues held.	1,680	Dialogue records, quarterly
OP-5	Output 2.1.1	Number of households that receive both grant payments.	6,000	Payment records, quarterly

Review

Who Has Reviewed This Theory

Group	How They Took Part	What Changed
Adolescents (48, of Whom 26 Girls)	Four group discussions with young people aged 12 to 17, August 2026.	Added a child-friendly reporting number; asked that each committee include a young woman.
Parents and Village Leaders (60, in six villages)	Six group discussions, August 2026.	Added family support to keep children in school; set confidentiality rules for committees.
Provincial Social Welfare Office	Review of the draft, September 2026.	Set the 14-day response time; agreed to host 12 case workers.
Teachers, Health Workers and Police Desk Officers (24)	One meeting and written comments, August 2026.	Added written referral steps at each service point.
Program Staff	Two design sessions, July 2026.	Merged two overlapping activities; clarified how response time is measured.

When We Will Revisit

The Program Design Lead will review the theory every six months, using the quarterly indicator reports and the assumptions register, and a full review will take place at month 18 (June 2028) alongside the mid-term review. An early review will be triggered when an assumption rated low is shown to be wrong, when an indicator for a pathway is more than 20 points below target for two quarters, or when drought or displacement disrupts several districts. The Program Director will approve changes after consulting the Marendia Child Welfare Alliance, and the funder will be told of any change to outcomes or targets.

Version Log

Version	Date	Change
1.0	9 October 2026	First version